

Oakway Middle School Implements Healthy Ventures and Sees Success

Issue

With increasing pressure on teachers to meet academic standards and produce high test scores, Deb Wallace, a teacher at Oakway Middle School in Westminster, S.C., has seen the emphasis on physical activity and movement decrease while waistlines increase. The rural middle school lacks access to environmental supports that promote physical activity.

While the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting screen time to two hours or less per day, 49.3 percent of SC students in 6th through 8th grades reported watching three or more hours of television on school days in 2005. Watching television and playing video games have become alternatives to physical activity, and are now linked to the prevalence of overweight in children. The economic impact of obesity is staggering – South Carolina experienced \$1.1 billion in obesity-attributable medical expenditures in 2003.

Intervention

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC) Region 1 is initiating *Healthy Ventures* to highlight and redirect efforts to address physical activity and nutrition. Healthy Ventures sponsors a Youth Forum each fall, where students from each middle and high school in Oconee join forces to learn about youth asset development. Thanks in part to PHHS Block Grant funding, a DHEC Health Educator has been able to refocus youth tasks on physical activity and nutrition, as well as provide technical support and leadership to the Healthy Ventures organizations and participating schools. Schools are given the flexibility to assess and address physical activity and nutrition as needed within their schools.

Important milestones since August 2005 include:

- Five middle schools received physical activity kits provided through the Centers for Disease Control's physical activity campaign for children ages 9 - 13 years old. The kits contained objects to promote physical activity, such as flying discs and lighted bouncing balls, as well as educational brochures.
- Four high schools received a supply of twenty-five standard Frisbees.
- Educational materials, including physical activity and nutritional posters, were obtained and distributed to schools.

Impact

At Oakway Middle School, students, teachers, and parents alike are excited about the new focus on health. Students are allowed to drink water and juice throughout the school day. The school removed vending machines with junk food and replaced them with healthier snack alternatives, and as a result, the students and teachers have lost a combined weight of over 200 pounds. Work continues on a nature/hiking trail and inventing new flying disc games, while leaders continue to search for and help organize community activities that focus on fun and physical activity as opposed to eating.

As a result of this program, the following has occurred throughout Oconee County:

- One hundred twenty students and nine teacher advisors, representing 6th through 12th grades and a total of nine schools, were trained in Asset Development as defined by the Search Institute, Minnesota, to use leadership skills to effectively address physical activity and nutrition within their respective schools.
- Each middle and high school has developed a health plan to address physical activity/nutrition within respective schools.
- In the spring of 2006, participants from all nine schools will return to the Youth Celebration to report on individual school progress.

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